

Embedded Training Teams Developing Afghans

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"Give a man a fish and feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and feed him for a lifetime" -Chinese Proverb

For the past seven years, US and Coalition forces have trained the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and fought and died with them in thousands of combat operations. With the number of violent attacks escalating by 40% in the first half of 2008, the US has committed to sending in more troops and equipment to combat the growing insurgent threat.¹ Decisions like this made at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels contradict established counterinsurgent doctrine, have created a scenario that does not facilitate success by any measure, and impede the development of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). In order to achieve success in Afghanistan, Embedded Training Teams (ETTs) must be staffed, trained, and structured (in order) to foster the development and autonomy of the ANSF.

The conflict, the mission, and the endstate

The conflict in Afghanistan is undeniably complex. Understanding its nature is imperative in developing a course of action. The conflict's violent actions throughout the country

¹ "Rise in Taliban attacks worries U.S." *CNN Online*. 2008. <<http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/06/26/afghan.fighting/index.html>> (17 Nov 2008).

are described by counterinsurgency experts Trent Scott and John Agoglia as:

...a deteriorating situation that is further exacerbated and complicated by criminal activity, narco-trafficking and spoiling actions by third parties (including most prominently Iran and Pakistan). The insurgency itself is not homogenous and factors that contribute to the continuation of the insurgency vary from region to region and even from district to district.

Due to the unique and varying threats, ETTs should study the specific region they will be operating in and train in that environment. An extended remain-in-place is critical to understanding the local threats and personalities of the forces they will be advising and, more importantly, the people whose land they will occupy. Scott and Agoglia continue to frame the threat by writing,

The Taliban remain in strength in significant areas of the country and are motivated by a number of factors including power, Islamic extremism, profit, frustration and fear. In many parts of the country, especially outside of major population centers, the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Government of the

Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA) is under considerable threat not only from insurgents but also from widespread corruption and patronage, traditional tribal power structures, a xenophobic society in the south and east, and a lack of tangible, synchronized reconstruction and development.²

Understanding that Afghanistan is engaged in a complex counterinsurgency, the focus of commanders at all levels must be on the population. The insurgents are trying to drive a wedge between the local population and the ANSF, and as a second-order effect, between the coalition forces and their ANSF counterparts. All ANSF and coalition force efforts should conversely be focused on driving the wedge between the insurgents and the local population. Whoever the population entrusts themselves to will establish legitimacy.

To understand how we can conduct the fight in Afghanistan, FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, outlines the procedures on how to analyze, and counteract an insurgency. Numerous articles on counterinsurgency have been written by individuals such as author and military advisor David Kilcullen. However, despite this abundance of academic and military research, including after action reports, coalition forces have continually

² Trent Scott and John Agoglia, "Getting the Basics Right: A Discussion for Strategic Impact in Afghanistan," *Small Wars Journal* (2008) 2-3.

implemented policies that constrain the efforts of their own efforts, or worse yet, enforce actions that bolster the insurgency. While Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A), International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and Combined Joint Task Force Phoenix (CJTF-P) all have mission statements that state they are in Afghanistan in order to foster the development of the ANSF and the legitimacy of the GIRoA, none of them have a published or implied endstate.³ Defining what coalition success will be in Afghanistan is critical to the method in which subordinate commanders execute their orders. An established endstate that is more than rhetoric (i.e - a legitimate, sustainable government) will be needed in order to accomplish the mission.

Establishing Legitimacy

The main purpose of a counterinsurgency is to "foster development of effective governance by a legitimate government."⁴ While much of the efforts of the ETs are focused on forcing the Afghan soldiers to make decisions on their own, actions at the strategic and operational level contradict and undermine these efforts. Specifically, on 17 Nov 2008, Afghan President Hamid Karzai stated that he wanted to enter into peace negotiations

³ "CSTC-A", <http://www.cstc-a.com/Mission.html>, "ISAF", <http://www.nato.int/issues/isaf/index.html>, "CJTF-Phoenix", <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/dod/cjtf-phoenix.htm>.

⁴ FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 1-113.

with the key Taliban leaders. His actions were immediately rebuked by senior US and NATO officials.⁵ This lack of public support by top coalition leaders is a tactical insurgent victory that coalition strategic leaders do not support the legitimacy of the Afghan government. While not as highly publicized, these legitimacy-subverting actions happen at the tactical level as well. Every time a coalition unit conducts a "cordon-and-knock" or a vehicle checkpoint that is not led exclusively by the ANSF, the GIRoA has lost legitimacy with every Afghan encountered by that operation. Long-term success in Afghanistan is an Afghan solution, led by Afghans.

Embedded trainers at all levels must be aligned within the Afghan system to facilitate the Afghan decision-maker's ability to find Afghan solutions for Afghan problems. Policy-makers, State Department officials, Battlespace Commanders, and especially ETTs have to understand that the coalition role is to assist, advise, and train the Afghans in defeating the counterinsurgency, not on defeating it themselves. The concept of "winning in Afghanistan" must be stricken from the thoughts of every person involved in the coalition's efforts. If U.S. and coalition forces wiped out all insurgent forces tomorrow, the Afghans would not be any closer to a stabilized, legitimate

⁵ Aryn Baker. "Afghan Overture: Behind Karzai's Appeal to Mullah Omar." <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1859576,00.html>.

government or sustainable military forces. Any time coalition forces conduct operations, kinetic or otherwise, without any ANSF, they endorse the insurgent's claim that this war is between the "foreign invaders" and the Afghans.

ETT Staffing

Taking into account the critical nature of ETTs in the development of Afghan legitimacy and sovereignty, special considerations must be made to where the ETTs are sourced from U.S. and coalition forces. ETTs do not have to be made up of primarily infantry or combat arms Marines. Marines from support MOSs that traditionally do not deploy to the front lines may in fact be better equipped to conduct the mission of an ETT. Assuming that they meet high standards of physical fitness, leadership, and initiative, a "non-combat MOS" Marine brings a different perspective to the fight. Though not as tactically proficient at maneuver warfare, it cannot be denied that these Marines can (and currently do) accomplish the job of an ETT. In addition, the utilization of Marines that do not deploy with the same frequency and duration as combat arms MOSs will provide some much needed relief to the Individual Augments of the combat arms units. Employing a variety of MOSs, from civil affairs, to aviation mechanics, to the water purification system operators can bring the technical expertise needed to improve the Afghan

military in specific areas while still possessing the abilities of a combat-trained Marine.

Former ETT OIC LtCol Chris Nash states, "Your success or failure in Afghanistan will be more based on how your parents raised you than anything you ever learned in the USMC... The 12 or 16 years you spent in school learning how to read and write, they (Afghans) spent learning how to read people. By the time you actually know what is going on, they have already read you from cover to cover - that's why your commitment and genuine concern is so important."⁶ While strength of character is difficult to measure, each ETT can be selected from a group of volunteers based on past performance and screened in order to ensure that Marines deploying as ETTs are committed to the success of the mission.

ETT Training

Coalition forces are teaching ANSF military tactics. In the same way that ETTs, prior to deploying, are woefully under-trained in COIN, coalition forces are not training the ANSF in COIN at all. Continuing to ignore this aspect of the advising package will ensure that in the best case, coalition forces will always be

⁶ LtCol Chris Nash. "Observations and Opinions IRT Operations in Afghanistan by a Former ETT OIC." Powerpoint presentation, slide 8, August 2008.

needed in Afghanistan, or in the worst case, complete, abject failure of the mission.

ETT Structure

The manner in which ETTs are structured with their adjacent and higher units will dictate the level of ANSF cooperation and the overall success of the mission.

Since relationships are the most important aspect of an Afghan's life, his relationships to his family and tribe impact his every action and thought. Bringing in an ETT, and assigning him to an Afghan unit for 10-15 months (of which 3-4 months are spent in- and out-processing, training, and conducting leave), forces an Afghan to remain distant from his American counterpart. Afghans consider it a waste of their time and energy to listen to an advisor who will be gone by the next winter. Save for a few FOBs and combat outposts at the far reaches of the country, most ETT's living quarters are separated from their Afghan counterparts by a HESCO barrier, razor and concertina wire, an armed gate, and machinegun positions. Currently, coalition forces eat, sleep, and play in separate spaces from the people they are trying to train. Intentional or not, it conveys a sense of distrust, hostility, and disrespect to their hosts. Increasing the length of the tours while decreasing the spatial gap between how advisors live in country

with the Afghans will provide innumerable benefits to coalition efforts to accomplish the mission in Afghanistan.

In order to capitalize on the efforts of ETTs, obvious changes will have to be made to various force protection and administrative rules and regulations for deployed Marines. While the dwell ratio is an important factor for the welfare and sustainment of military forces, it does not convey commitment to the Afghans and is not conducive to conducting a counterinsurgency in Afghanistan. FM 3-24 states, "Planning and commitments should be based on sustainable operating tempo and personal tempo limits for the various components of the force."⁷ Additionally, Force Protection requirements must be changed in order to foster a hospitable living environment between ETTs and Afghans. This critical requirement is clearly articulated in FM 3-24: "Ultimate success in COIN is gained by protecting the populace, not the COIN force."⁸ Despite multiple articles written in the *Marine Corps Gazette* and the many after-action reports submitted by outgoing units⁹, the critical requirements of tour lengthening and closer "embedment" with the Afghans remains ignored.

⁷ FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 1-135.

⁸ FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 1-149.

⁹ Scott Cuomo, "Embedded Training Teams," *Marine Corps Gazette*. Quantico: Jun 2006. Vol. 90, Iss. 6; p. 62

Brian Humphreys, "Problems of Culture," *Marine Corps Gazette*. Quantico: Jul 2007. Vol. 91, Iss. 7; p. 46

Road Ahead

With the advent of fixing ANA units in regional locations, the Afghan government has shown that they are capable and willing to enact change in support of defeating the insurgents. The United States, coalition forces, and the Embedded Training Teams must match their resolve in a way that the Afghan understands; An influx of money, troops, and weaponry is appreciated, but what the Afghan people and military want to see is a commitment on a personal level. Their legitimacy and sovereignty is dependent upon the coalition forces assisting Afghans in an Afghan effort for an Afghan solution to an Afghan problem.

In his 28th tenet of counterinsurgency David KilCullen accurately states, "In counterinsurgency, the enemy initiates most attacks, targets you unexpectedly and withdraws too fast for you to react. Do not be drawn into purely reactive operations: focus on the population, build your own solution, further your game plan and fight the enemy only when he gets in the way. This gains and keeps the initiative.¹⁰ When coalition forces begin to understand this, and facilitate the ANSF's

¹⁰ David Kilcullen. The Small Wars Manual. 1 Mar 2006, available at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/28articles.pdf>.

employment of these efforts, real progress will in Afghanistan will reveal itself.

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